

Oakland Unified School District ♦ Process Writing Assessment
9th Grade Expository Essay: Money for Grades

Introduction

The purpose of this assessment is to capture your best essay writing so that you can show what you do well and give your teachers a chance to learn about their teaching from your writing.

In this activity, you will write an expository essay about paying students for grades that reflects your distinct point of view. You will read a short passage by Amy Benfer from her article “Come to School, Collect \$100: Should Kids Be Paid for Academic Performance?” and you will take a position on whether you agree or disagree with the author’s position.

In this kind of writing, it is important to discuss the position the writer takes as a starting point for establishing your own thesis about the topic. The topic of the essay you will write is *paying students for academic performance*. To help you do your best, you will have an opportunity to think, read, and talk before you write.

Getting Started

Before you read the authors’ opinions, think about your grades, test scores, and desire to do well in school and talk with a partner to answer these questions:

- How do you feel about your GPA and test scores?
- Is it important to you to get good grades in high school?
- What motivates you to attend and work hard in school?

Now, in the boxes below, write down some pros and cons about money (or prizes) as reward for academic performance.

What are some things that make money for grades or attendance a good idea?
What are some things that make money for grades or attendance a bad idea?

PROS/Positives	CONS/Negatives
•	•
•	•
•	•



Share what you wrote down with your classmates. Did you both write similar points?

Understanding the Reading Passage:

Next, you will read and discuss an excerpt from the article “Come to School, Collect \$100! Should Kids Be Paid for Academic Performance?” In this article, Amy Benfer discusses the practice of paying students to attend and/or do well in school. As you read the passage below, **circle** any words or phrases that you do not understand or you have questions about. You will find the definitions of some words as footnotes.

Come to School, Collect \$100!

Benfer, Amy. (2009, October 13). Come to School, Collect \$100! *Should Kids be Paid for Academic Performance?* Retrieved November 2, 2009, from Salon Magazine website: www.salon.com

Education is one of those values that just about everyone agrees is a good thing. But how do you keep kids interested in school? Do you make classes more interesting and hire good teachers? Draw up stricter standards to objectively measure “accomplishment” and hold students and teachers accountable for meeting them? How about just paying off the kids that meet your standards, regardless of what those standards might be?

France is the latest country to experiment with providing cash **incentives**¹ to underachieving students. . . . The program is simple: Students at three high schools in the suburbs of Paris will receive “reward payments” up to \$15,000 per year for attendance and reaching “performance targets agreed upon by their teachers.” These aren’t straight cash payments: They can only be redeemed for “school-related projects” such as “a class trip **abroad**² to improve foreign language skills, computer equipment for the classroom or driving lessons to obtain a license.”

Sounds like pretty good stuff. But it does raise the question: Wouldn’t kids be motivated to do better in school if attending school already included the opportunity to study abroad, work on decent computer equipment, or obtain a driver’s license? And should one’s opportunity to do so be limited by fellow students’ attendance records and achievement? Couldn’t one spend the same amount of money to put these programs in place and offer the spots to students who wish to participate and meet the entrance criteria? Doesn’t the existence of “special” programs **imply**³ that the rest of school is kind of a drag?

The idea, of course, is to link school **achievement**⁴ to future earnings to kids who educators seem to think might not otherwise make the connection. Sam Scavella, a principle in Georgia who offers iPods and big-screen TVs, is **explicit**⁵ about this, “If you do well in school, then you can afford a lifestyle that will pay you well,” he told USA Today. And Rose Marie Mills, a principal at a New York City school where 90 percent of the students are below the poverty level, told the Post, “When they get the checks, there’s that competitiveness -- ‘Oh, I’m going to get more money than you next time’ – so it’s something that excites them.”

Sure, going to college is one of the surest ways to boost one’s lifetime **earnings**⁶. And kids who aren’t necessarily having that message reinforced by their parents might react well to a little external motivation. But the biggest gap between students at high-performing schools and underperforming schools is much larger than \$100, \$500 or a big-screen TV. In **affluent**⁷ school districts, academic performance is the competitive battlefield: Taking AP classes means college credit; students compete with their peers for higher SAT scores; and the reward is a place in a competitive school. Replicating that kind of environment costs an awful lot more than an iPod.

In bribing kids to do well in school, educators are following a road well **trod**⁸ by generations of frustrated parents. While I don't **begrudge** kids a few hundred-dollar checks, I have to say that next to having teachers that will **nurture** and encourage, say, one kid's obsession with writing, or teach another to build a rocket for a science fair, or help another to get a scholarship to study abroad, it seems pretty **paltry**⁹.

¹Rewards to motivate, ²Out of the country, ³Mean, ⁴Success, ⁵Clear, ⁶Take-home pay, ⁷Wealthy, ⁸Traveled, ⁹Measly

1. Take a moment to write down your best idea of what the words below mean. Next, your teacher will facilitate a conversation about the meanings of these words to help you better understand them.

achievement motivation begrudge nurture paltry

2. Now, reread the article and underline any important ideas you can identify. With your partner, take turns explaining the article about paying students for grades to each other. As your partner talks, write down the important ideas you hear:

3. Go back to the article and underline the authors' main idea about paying students for academic performance then write it below:

Amy Benfer's Argument		
Evidence	Evidence	Evidence

4. Summarize the article’s main point about using incentives to motivate students. You may use a quotation from the passage to help summarize the author’s points.

In the excerpt from “Come to School: Collect \$100,” Amy Benfer (*maintains, argues, discusses, explains*).....

Thinking, Talking and Planning: Your Position

Discuss the article’s position on paying students for academic performance and discuss both sides of the position with your classmates. Write key points in the chart below. Give examples to support your positions.

Agree with Benfer	Disagree with Benfer
Article’s Main Assertion:	
e.g. Instead of offering cash incentives, it would be better to offer study abroad programs.	e.g. Paying students for academic performance helps kids see the direct link between income and education.

Take a stand on the topic. Do you agree or disagree with this author’s position on paying students for academic performance? (Circle your position)

Agree

Disagree

Writing Directions for Day 3:

Paying Students for Academic Performance

The OUSD School Board wants to know if paying students to attend school or to get good grades is a good idea.

Explain Amy Benfer’s position on paying students for academic performance and discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with her position. Support your position by referring to and citing the article and by providing reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

Writing Reminders:

As you write, keep the following points in mind since you won’t have time to rewrite.

- ___ Begin in an interesting way that leads to your thesis (position) of your essay.
- ___ Choose strong arguments to support your opinion.
- ___ Develop your arguments by including specific references to the reading, explanation, personal experiences, examples, and/or statistics.
- ___ Show in your writing that you know both sides of the issue, and why you disagree with the other point of view.
- ___ Use language and vocabulary that is persuasive, precise, and lively.
- ___ Organize the main sections of your essay into paragraphs so that the reader can follow your ideas.
- ___ End with a confident conclusion that restates your thesis.

After You Write (Editing)

After you write, take time to review the items below. You may make changes right on your paper.

- ___ Give the essay a title. (You can choose your title before or after you write the essay.)
- ___ Check your punctuation. Use capital letters, commas, periods, and quotation marks appropriately.
- ___ Check your spelling.